

VZCZCXRO1979
RR RUEHDBU
DE RUEHMO #0010 0081439
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 081439Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6206
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 000010

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: DEFENSE REFORM: IVANOV ANNOUNCES TWO INITIATIVES

Classified By: Pol MinCouns Alice G. Wells reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (SBU) Spurred by public concern over the widespread abuse of conscripts, Minister of Defense Sergey Ivanov outlined two initiatives to improve the quality of life in the military when he met November 16 with senior commanders of the Armed Forces. Ivanov called for the creation of Parents' Committees, whose members would be allowed to visit soldiers at their military facilities. Ivanov also signed an order for the establishment of a "Public Chamber" attached to the Ministry of Defense (MOD) that would increase transparency over MOD policy. The MOD Public Chamber, which will include public figures such as Union of Soldiers' Mothers' Committee Chairman Valentina Melnikova, movie director Nikita Mikhalkov, and Lukoil President Vagit Alekperov, will offer policy recommendations to senior MOD officials.

¶2. (C) Melnikova told us that since the late 1980's her organization had regularly proposed both initiatives. She reminded us that Ivanov had singled out conscripts' mothers as the most "agitating and uncompromising" segment of society. She hypothesized that Ivanov's initiative intended to co-opt conscripts' mothers and mitigate their criticism of MOD policies. Melnikova also noted that invitations to join Parents' Committees would originate in the MOD, with membership likely restricted to parents whose sons were current conscripts, a move that would effectively block her organization's leadership from participation. Nonetheless, Melnikova said her organization was ready to work with the MOD on the Parents' Committees.

¶3. (C) Aleksandr Sharavin of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis challenged the feasibility of the Parents' Committees concept. He noted that the MOD has neither the resources nor the desire to support groups of parents traveling to military facilities to check on their sons' welfare. Although parents would be expected to bear the cost of travel and other expenses to visit their sons, the program would still require considerable logistical support from local commanders. Sharavin said, at best, parents would visit Potemkin Villages. Sharavin predicted that the MOD would only give lip service to the Public Chamber, since there are no legal mechanisms to force the MOD to act on Public Chamber recommendations. Sharavin emphasized, as he has done with us on several occasions, that Ivanov's actions and statements must be seen in the context of his presidential ambitions. He added that Ivanov had announced these initiatives during a meeting with senior military commanders, who are averse to change and philosophically opposed to their implementation.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Ivanov's record in following through on such initiatives is uneven at best. Last March, for example, he ordered the creation of military police units to combat hazing, but the MOD still has not implemented his directive. Ivanov has displayed little inclination to confront senior military officers. Nonetheless, Ivanov's proposals reflect

the fact that the MOD must improve the situation of conscripts and the military in general, or, given demographic trends, it will face the prospect of being unable to fill the ranks.

RUSSELL